

## **Palm Sunday – Mark’s Passion 2024**

Today we hear Mark’s description of Jesus’ last days.

These few chapters hold a great deal, and so I will allow the story itself be the focus of our attention today. But I will just say a few words by way of introduction.

Our passion reading begins with the woman who anoints Jesus with the most extraordinarily expensive perfume. Criticised by many, Jesus defends her and proclaims that her story must be told alongside the good news of the kingdom. In other words what she has done stands for the extravagant expression of love that does not count the cost.

Palm Sunday of course includes the sense of anticipation and excitement of the arrival in Jerusalem.

We have of course often heard how much this ride into Jerusalem was a political act, a deliberate staging of an old prophecy, on the very day when, on the opposite side of the city the Roman military parade was entering the city from the Western hill palace, a spectacular display of might and strength, designed to frighten and subdue.

This makes Palm Sunday a sense of choice. Choosing between a kingdom of empire, might and strength, and a different kind of kingdom, the Kingdom of God, the reign of justice and peace for the humble, the poor, the marginalised and the overlooked.

When we are reminded that there is a choice to be made we might also remember that it is not always an easy or an obvious choice. It is not the choice to be on one winning side or another. These are not evenly matched sides in this world! It is not simply the choice to be left or right, progressive or conservative, wet or dry. It is the choice to join the dream of a world not yet fully here. It is the choice to seek the glimpse of the divine in the everyday and to adore, protect, nurture and share. It is the choice to believe ourselves precious – but no more so than any other creature of our Creator. It is the choice to choose life and the ways that make for life for everyone not simply for the few. It is the choice to be grateful to be last and encourage those who have less to go before us. It is to choose mourning and poorness so that we are emptied out and ready for God’s way.

To choose the Kingdom over the Empire is to choose the Way of the cross and the one who died on a cross. It is a demanding way. It is also the way of enjoying eating, drinking and dancing with those who are on the outskirts of the city. It is also the way of foolish wisdom and deep peace more than security and certainty. It is the way of love over hate, hope over fear, and life over death.

– and as we watch the events unfold this week we can only be taken by surprise once again at the startling realisation about the way Jesus came to show God’s kingdom of love and of peace – and as we respond to Christ’s invitation to the communion table, we might ask how we can show that kingdom in our lives today.

This is why my words come before the reading, so at the end of Mark's retelling, we will have a time of silence to notice where our attention is caught, what emerges in us as we consider this momentous week, which has become the foundation of our faith, and the grounding of our understanding of God.

For forgiveness for the many times we have denied Jesus,  
Lord in your mercy  
**Hear our prayer.**

For grace to seek out those habits of sin which mean  
spiritual death,  
and by prayer and self-discipline to overcome them,  
Lord in your mercy  
**Hear our prayer.**

For Christian people,  
that through the suffering of disunity  
there may grow a rich union in Christ,  
Lord in your mercy  
**Hear our prayer.**

For those who make laws, interpret them, and administer them,  
that our common life may be ordered in justice and mercy,  
Lord in your mercy  
**Hear our prayer.**

For those who still make Jerusalem a battleground,  
Lord in your mercy  
**Hear our prayer.**

For those who have the courage and honesty to work openly for  
justice and peace,  
Lord in your mercy  
**Hear our prayer.**

For those in the darkness and agony of isolation,  
that they may find support and encouragement,  
Lord in your mercy  
**Hear our prayer.**

For those who, weighed down with hardship, failure, or sorrow,  
feel that God is far from them,  
Lord in your mercy  
**Hear our prayer.**

For those who are tempted to give up the way of the cross,  
Lord in your mercy  
**Hear our prayer.**

That we, with those who have died in faith,

may find mercy in the day of Christ,  
Lord in your mercy  
**Hear our prayer.**